

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) A dispensing device of portable terminals having means for acquiring data relating to products to be purchased by customers in a shopping centre, comprising:

- a plurality of cradles for a corresponding plurality of portable terminals to be withdrawn and used by the customers of the shopping centre for product data acquisition;
- means for identifying each customer enabled to use the portable terminals;
- means for communicating to each identified customer, a corresponding terminal to be withdrawn among said plurality of terminals for the product data acquisition;
- a data control and processing unit connected to the identifying means and the communicating means, said control unit carrying out the identification of the customer by means of said identification means, associating the corresponding terminal to the identified customer and communicating to the identified customer the corresponding terminal to be withdrawn by means of said communicating means;

wherein said plurality of cradles, said identifying means, said communicating means, and said control unit are housed in a single housing, and wherein said plurality of cradles is housed in a substantially flat portion of said housing, said substantially flat portion being provided in close proximity of the customer identifying means so as to allow access to said plurality of terminals;

wherein said portion for housing said terminals comprises a body including a plurality of compartments constituting said plurality of terminal cradles;

wherein said plurality of compartments comprises:

- a first upper aperture for inserting the terminal, wherein an axis orthogonal to said flat portion is defined and a terminal insertion axis inclined by a predetermined angle with respect to the said axis is defined;

- a second lower discharge aperture below the first aperture;
- means for guiding the terminal into the compartment.

2. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 1, wherein said portion for housing said terminals is substantially horizontal.

3. CANCELLED

4. (Currently Amended) A dispensing device according to claim 3~~1~~, wherein each compartment of said plurality of compartments is adapted to house a terminal of said plurality of terminals and comprises locking/unlocking means of the terminal housed therein.

5. (Currently Amended) A dispensing device according to claim 3~~1~~, wherein said ~~box~~ ~~shaped~~ body comprises first electrical connectors adapted to cooperate with second electrical connectors provided on the terminals.

6. CANCELLED

7. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 6~~1~~, wherein said second aperture has a size larger than that of said first aperture.

8. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 6~~1~~, wherein each compartment of said plurality of compartments comprises a terminal support element arranged inside each compartment, substantially away from a projection of the first aperture along the vertical axis.

9. (Currently Amended) A dispensing device according to claim 8, wherein said terminal support element comprises opposed guiding walls inclined at said predetermined angle with respect to said ~~vertical~~ axis, and wherein one of said walls comprises a support

step for contacting a lower end of the terminal, the support step being arranged outside the projection of the first aperture along the vertical axis.

10. (Currently Amended) A dispensing device according to claim 6~~1~~, wherein said ~~box-shaped~~ body comprises a covering surface provided with a plurality of holes at said first terminal insertion apertures.

11. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 1, further comprising means for moving the housing.

12. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according claim 1, wherein the customer identifying means comprises at least any one of the following means: a magnetic card reader, a smart card reader, a bar-code card reader, an optical receiver, a radio or mobile phone receiver, a fingerprint reader, a fingerprint or retina detector, a device for entering a numerical code, a voice detector.

13. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 1, wherein the means for communicating to identified customers the terminals to be withdrawn comprises at least any one of the following means: visual communication means on a display or monitor, visual communication means in the proximity of each cradle of said plurality of cradles, sound or voice communication means, terminal lifting means provided into each cradle of said plurality of cradles.

14. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 1, wherein the communicating means provides one of marketing information, promotional information and a discount voucher.

15. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 1, further comprising one of the following:

data transmission means to an optical-type terminal;

data transmission means to a radio-type terminal;

data transmission means from an optical-type terminal; and

data transmission means from a radio-type terminal.

16. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 1, wherein said housing comprises a charge/discharge circuit for batteries of the terminals.

17. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according claim 31, wherein each compartment comprises at least one sensor for indicating presence and/or correct arrangement of the terminal into the compartment.

18. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 1, wherein said housing comprises means for printing one of ticket, marketing or promotional information and a discount voucher.

19. (Currently Amended) An integrated system for the automatic dispensing of portable terminals having means for acquiring data relating to products to be purchased by customers in a shopping centre, comprising:

- at least one dispenser of portable terminals for acquiring product data in a shopping centre;
- a control station of said at least one terminal dispenser;
- a connection network between said at least one terminal dispenser and said control station so as to allow the exchange of information therebetween;

wherein said at least one dispenser comprises:

- a plurality of cradles for a corresponding plurality of portable terminals to be withdrawn and used by the customers of a shopping center for product data acquisition;
- means for identifying each customer enabled to use the portable terminals;
- means for communicating to each identified customer, a corresponding terminal to be withdrawn among said plurality of terminals for the product data acquisition;
- a data control and processing unit connected to the identifying means and the communicating means, said control unit carrying out the identification of the customer by means of said identification means, associating the corresponding terminal to the identified customer and communicating to the identified customer the corresponding terminal to be withdrawn by means of said communicating means;

wherein said plurality of cradles, said identifying means, said communicating means and said control unit are housed in a single housing, and wherein said plurality of cradles is housed in a substantially flat portion of said housing, said substantially flat

portion being provided in close proximity of the customer identifying means so as to allow access to said plurality of terminals;

wherein said portion for housing said terminals comprises a body including a plurality of compartments constituting said plurality of terminal cradles;

wherein said plurality of compartments comprises:

- a first upper aperture for inserting the terminal, wherein an axis orthogonal to said flat portion is defined and a terminal insertion axis inclined by a predetermined angle with respect to the vertical axis is defined;
- a second lower discharge aperture below the first aperture;
- means for guiding the terminal into the compartment.

20. (CANCELLED)

21. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 19, wherein said control station is in remote position with respect to said at least one terminal dispenser.

22. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 21, wherein said connection network is a wireless local network.

23. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 21, wherein said connection network is a geographic network.

24. (Previously Presented) An integrated system according to claim 19, further comprising

- means for downloading the product data acquired through the terminals;
- means for computing, as a function of the acquired data, an amount to be paid.

25. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 24, wherein said means for downloading the product data acquired through the terminals are housed in the terminal dispenser.

26. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 24, wherein said means for downloading the product data acquired through the terminals are provided in remote position with respect to the terminal dispenser.

27. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 24, further comprising at least one cash register for the payment of said amount.
28. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 24, further comprising means for charging an amount to be paid directly to a bank account of the customer.
29. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 24, wherein at least a portion of the terminals used for acquiring the product data is dispensed to the customers for personal use.
30. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 24, wherein at least a portion of the terminals used for acquiring the product data is a code reading device provided with an interface for the connection with a personal terminal belonging to the customers.
31. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 29, wherein the terminal has means for allowing automatic identification of the customer.
32. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 24, wherein at least one of said terminals exchanges information with the control station through a wireless connection network.
33. (Previously Presented) A system according to 24, wherein at least one of the terminals receives, either visually or voice, one of marketing information, promotional information, and a discount voucher.
34. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 28, wherein said means for charging the amount to be paid is controlled by the terminal.
35. (Currently Amended) An integrated system for the sales of products in a shopping centre, comprising:
- portable terminals having means for acquiring data relating to products to be purchased by customers in the shopping center;
 - a dispensing device of said portable terminals;

- means for identifying a customer enabled to use the portable terminals;
- means for communicating to the identified customer a corresponding terminal to be withdrawn among said portable terminals for the product data acquisition;
- a data control and processing unit connected to the identifying means and the communicating means, said control unit carrying out the identification of the customer by means of said identification means, associating the corresponding terminal to the identified customer and communicating to the identified customer the corresponding terminal to be withdrawn by means of said communicating means;
- means for downloading the product data acquired through a portable terminal dispensed to the identified customer;
- means for computing, as a function of the acquired product data, an amount to be paid;
wherein at least one of said portable terminals is a code reading device provided with an interface for the connection with a personal terminal belonging to the customer;
wherein said dispensing device comprises a plurality of compartments for housing said portable terminals, wherein each compartment comprises:
 - a first upper aperture for inserting the terminal, wherein an axis orthogonal to said flat portion is defined and a terminal insertion axis inclined by a predetermined angle with respect to the vertical axis is defined;
 - a second lower discharge aperture below the first aperture;
 - means for guiding the terminal into the compartment.

36. (Currently Amended) A dispenser of portable terminals, the portable terminals having means for acquiring data relating to products to be purchased by customers in a shopping center, the dispenser comprising:

- a dispenser housing;
- a plurality of cradles for a corresponding plurality of portable terminals to be withdrawn and used by the customers of the shopping centre for product data acquisition, said plurality of cradles being housed in a substantially flat portion of said housing;
plural compartments in the housing for accommodating corresponding plural portable terminals;
- means for identifying a customer entitled to withdraw and use one of the portable terminals;
- means for communicating to the entitled customer which one of the plural portable terminals is allocated to the entitled customer for use in product data acquisition;

a data control and processing unit which controls the identifying means and the communicating means;

wherein each compartment comprises:

- an upper aperture for receiving a terminal inserted therein;
- a compartment first guiding wall inclined at a predetermined angle ~~to~~ with respect an ~~vertical-axis orthogonal to said flat portion;~~
- a support step provided on the compartment first wall for contacting a lower end of the terminal;
- a lower ~~service~~ discharge aperture situated beneath the upper aperture.

37. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 36, further comprising a compartment further wall which is opposed to the compartment first wall.

38. (CANCELLED)

39. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 36, wherein the support step has a first electrical connector thereon for mating with a second electrical connector on the terminal.

40. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 36, where each compartment has a sensor for detecting at least one of presence and correct orientation of the terminal in the compartment.

41. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 36, wherein each compartment has means for selectively locking the terminal in the compartment.

42. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 36, wherein each compartment has a terminal lifting mechanism for selectively lifting the terminal allocated to the entitled customer relative to the compartment.

43. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 36, wherein when contacting the support step, two-thirds of a longest aspect of the terminal along the predetermined angle extends out of the compartment.

44. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 1, wherein said data control and processing unit further processes the product data acquired through said terminals.

45. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 1, wherein at least one of said terminals is a code reading device provided with an interface for the connection to a personal terminal belonging to the customer.

46. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 24, wherein at least one of said terminals is a code reading device provided with an interface for the connection to a personal terminal belonging to the customer.

47. (Currently Amended) A dispensing device of portable terminals having means for acquiring data relating to products to be purchased by customers in a shopping center, comprising:

- a plurality of cradles for a corresponding plurality of portable terminals to be withdrawn and used by the customers of the shopping centre for product data acquisition;
- means for identifying each customer enabled to use the portable terminals;
- means for communicating to each identified customer a corresponding terminal to be withdrawn among said plurality of terminals for the product data acquisition;
- a multifunctional customer interface for communicating with customers,
- a data control and processing unit connected to the identifying means, the communicating means, and the multifunctional customer interface, said control unit carrying out the identification of the customer by means of said identification means, associating the corresponding terminal to the identified customer and communicating to the identified customer the corresponding terminal to be withdrawn by means of said communicating means;

wherein said plurality of cradles, said identifying means, said communicating means, said multifunctional customer interface, and said control unit are housed in a single housing, and wherein said plurality of cradles is housed in a substantially flat portion of said housing, said substantially flat portion being provided in close proximity of the customer identifying means so as to allow access to said plurality of terminals;

wherein said portion for housing said terminals comprises a body including a plurality of compartments constituting said plurality of terminal cradles;

- said plurality of compartments comprising:
- a first upper aperture for inserting the terminal, wherein an axis orthogonal to said flat portion is defined and a terminal insertion axis inclined by a predetermined angle with respect to the said axis is defined;
- a second lower discharge aperture below the first aperture;
- means for guiding the terminal into the compartment.

48. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 47 wherein said multifunctional customer interface is based on multimedia technology.

49. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 47, wherein said multifunctional customer interface comprises at least one of the following means: visual communicating means on a display or a monitor; visual communication means in proximity of each cradle of said plurality of cradles; sound or voice communication means; terminal lifting means provided in each cradle of said plurality of cradles.

50. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 47, wherein said multifunctional customer interface comprises means for printing at least one of the following elements: tickets, marketing information, coupons, promotional information coupons, and discount vouchers.